Title: Scripture Alone (Sola Scriptura)

Series: Reformation Solas

Scriptures: Psalm 19:7-11; 2 Timothy 3.10-17

The authority of the Bible as the **only foundation** from which we may know what to believe and how to live is under attack today. In the sly words of the Serpent in the garden many people today question “Did God actually say?” {Gen 3.1}.

**Scripture says** God created our first parents supernaturally, some people say that we evolved from other species.

**Scripture says** God made us male or female. The unbelieving world says “your gender is fluid” – to be determined by how you feel about yourself.

**Scripture says** marriage is only to be between one man and one woman, but the 2013 New Zealand marriage amendment act states that *“marriage is between 2 people regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity”.*

**Scripture says** God gave the role of leadership in the church through ordained office-bearers, exclusively to men, some churches around the world today officially teach that women may lead in these roles.

Now go back 2,000 years in time. In his second letter to the younger man Timothy, the Apostle Paul is encouraging his ‘son in the faith’ to stay firm to the true gospel – the good news of salvation – which is taught in the Scriptures.

At that time false teachers threatened the church at Ephesus where Timothy was a pastor.

There was a concern with fables and myths (4.4; 1 Tim 1:4; 4:7).

There were quarrels about words (2:4, 23; 1 Tim 6:4), controversies (1 Tim 1:4; 6:4), meaningless talk (1 Tim 1:6) and godless chatter (2:16; 1 Tim 6:20).

False teaching included: prohibitions on marriage and certain foods (1 Tim 4:3), belief that the resurrection of believers had already taken place (2:18).

Paul names some of the false teachers who were damaging the church: Hymenaeus (2:17; 1 Tim 1:20), Alexander (1 Tim 1:20), and Philetus (2:17). These men **did not ground** their teaching on the Word of God **alone.**

Fast forward almost 1500 years. At that time, there was only one universal church in the West – the Roman Catholic Church. There was much false teaching which arose because the leadership; the pope, cardinals, bishops, priests and others **did not ground** their teaching on the word of God **alone.**

Rather the Roman Catholic Church combined both Scripture AND ecclesiastical tradition as the **joint rule for faith and life.** It was from this false foundation that false teaching arose such as:

1. Only the Roman Catholic Church has the authority to interpret Scripture
2. The Pope is the head of the church and has the authority of Christ
3. Forgiveness of sins and salvation is by faith AND works
4. The ‘merit’ of Mary and the ‘Saints’ can be applied to others
5. Penance is necessary for salvation
6. Purgatory is a place where the elect receive final purification before entering heaven

This is by no means a complete list of false doctrines.

There were many events leading up to 16th century Protestant Reformation in which people like Jan Hus, Peter Waldo and John Wycliffe were roused to action through the corruption and abuses which they saw in the Roman Catholic church of the time. Martin Luther was one of these Reformers. His action of publishing 95 theses, defending the truth of the Bible, and defiantly nailing these documents to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church in Germany on 31st October 1517 is generally considered by historians to be the start of the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformers formulated five slogans which summarised key Biblical truths. They called these ‘solas’. The word *sola* is a Latin term for “only”. The five Reformation Solas are:

*Sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”): The [Bible](http://www.biblestudytools.com/) alone is our highest authority.

*Sola Fide*(“faith alone”): People like us are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

*Sola Gratia* (“grace alone”): People like us are saved by the grace of God alone.

*Solus Christus*(“Christ alone”): Jesus Christ alone is Lord, Saviour, and King. He is the only way of salvation, the only way to be right with God, the only way by whom we can live forever.

*Soli Deo Gloria* (“to the glory of God alone”): We are made to live for the glory of God alone.

This is the first in a series of five sermons on the 5 ‘Solas’ of the Protestant Reformation: ‘Sola Scriptura’.

The slogan ‘Scripture Alone’ simply means that all the truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught in the Bible.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1.6) helpfully puts it this way:

“*The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men*.”

We are now going to focus on the truth of ‘Sola Scriptura’ from the Bible text 2nd Timothy 3 verses 10-17 under three headings:

1. The origin of the Bible
2. The value of the Bible
3. The purpose of the Bible
4. **The origin of the Bible**

Let’s begin with a quick Bible quiz:

How many human authors wrote the 66 books of the Bible? {pause} Answer - about 40.

When was the Bible written? {pause} Answer - from approx. 1500BC to 100AD – a period of about 1600 years.

What languages was the Bible first written down in? {pause} Answer - Hebrew & some Aramaic (OT) and the common Greek of the people (NT).

How many words are there in the Bible? {pause} Answer -There are 8,674 different Hebrew words in the Bible, 5,624 different Greek words, and 12,143 different English words in the King James Version.

Some words only occur once in the whole Bible – they are called ‘hapax legomena’ (from the Greek – meaning ‘said only once’). There are 1,500 *hapaxes* in the [Hebrew Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible), although only about 400 are not obviously related to other attested word forms. There are just under 2000 (1934) hapax legomena in the NT. A very significant one appears in our text today from 2 Tim 3.16: “*All Scripture is breathed out by God*”.

The single Greek word translated here “breathed out by God’ is ‘Theopneustos’. Although, as a hapax legomenon, this word ‘Theopneustos’ only occurs once in the Bible, we can understand it’s meaning from its three parts:

1. theo:  from theos, the Greek word for “God”.
2. pneus:  from pneo, the Greek verb meaning “breathe” or “blow”.  This is also the root word for pneuma, the Greek word for “wind”, from which we derive our English word ‘pneumatic’. More commonly in the NT this word is translated “spirit”.
3. tos:  this suffix in ancient Greek, especially with theos (“God”) almost always, if not always, indicates a passive form — it is describing something which is being done by God.

The word ‘theopneustos’ is not only unique – as a hapax legomena, it is also very rich in meaning. Paul is saying to Timothy in this letter that ‘All Scripture’ has its origin with God. ‘All Scripture’ comes from the only Giver of life – the same One True Living God who gave life to inanimate dust by breathing into the nostrils of the first man Adam the ‘breath of life’ (Gen 2.7). Now the word translated ‘Scripture’ here (graphe) is **not** a hapax legomenon it is used frequently in the NT. The gospels use ‘graphe’ to refer to the OT Scriptures e.g.

At Nazareth in the Synagogue Jesus says"*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*." (Luke 4.21)

The Apostle Peter includes Paul’s letters in the category of graphe (2 Pet 3.15-16)

“*There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures*”.

Paul himself identifies the words of the apostles as being ‘*those taught by the Spirit’* (1 Cor 2.13).

‘All Scripture’ then refers to the whole Bible. The OT and the NT at the time of Paul writing this letter in between 64-68AD (including some of the gospels & epistles which had been written, but not yet collated into the canon of Scripture at that time). Together with all other writings which would be directly ‘breathed out by God’ as they were penned over the next few decades until the 66 books were complete.

Now perhaps you are thinking…..wait a minute. You are telling us that the whole Bible has its origin from God, but didn’t you say that there were about 40 authors who penned the 66 books of the Bible over a period of about 1600 years…YES.

So how does that work? – glad you asked☺

**It is not** that God used human beings like mechanical robots to write the Bible.

**It is not** that people merely reflected on their own perceptions about God and his work when they authored the books of the Bible.

Rather, God breathed-out the words of the Bible through the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit to those human authors whilst retaining the individual character, style, gifts and cultural context of each one.

The Bible describes this ‘organic inspiration’:

“*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” {2 Pet 1.21}

The 66 books which comprise the Bible were not so much selected because the church made official decisions (which did take place, for example at the Council of Hippo, 393 AD and at Carthage in 397AD). These 66 books were compiled into the Bible we have today because they attest themselves to the hearts of all Spirit-indwelt people as being the living oracles of God. Just as the sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd who cares for them, so likewise, God’s people know the voice of Christ in His Word.

The Scriptures are our ultimate, trustworthy and infallible authority for faith and practice. This doesn’t mean that the Bible is the **only** place where truth is found, but it does mean that everything else we learn about God and his world, and all other authorities, should be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

When faced with ideas like the evolution of mankind, same-sex marriage, self-determined gender identity, and women leaders in the church, the truth of ‘Sola Scriptura’ is essential for us both to understand and to practice. The Bible **alone** is our benchmark/ measure/guide to determine what is false and what is true.

So the Bible is a very useful/valuable book – which brings us to our second point:

1. **The value of the Bible**

My own Study Bible weighs about 1kg it is physically heavy enough to be used for pressing flowers.

In civil courts of law, a copy of the Bible may be used symbolically for swearing an oath: “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”. Some people even ‘use’ their Bible as a ‘dust collector’ on an obscure shelf in their home.

A helpful question for us to ask is “Of what specific value/usefulness is the Bible?”

Paul gives the answer to pastor Timothy in his letter and our Divine Creator gives us the answer through His ‘God-breathed’ word in verse 16: “*All Scripture is ….profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*”.

Notice that there are no less than 4 key uses of Scripture identified here:

Teaching, reproof (rebuke), correction and training in righteousness

We’ll consider each one of these briefly in turn:

1. P**rofitable for teaching**

The Bible teaches all those who are willing to learn from its contents. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Question 5) asks “What do the Scriptures principally teach?”. The answer is given “*The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man*”. The Belgic Confession (Article 7) states that “*We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein*”.

We know that from a young age Timothy was ‘acquainted with the sacred writings which were able to make him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’. His grandmother Lois and mother Eunice taught him the gospel.

The Bible is of inestimable value because the Word of God teaches us (if we are willing to listen) about the mission God entrusted to His Son to save a people for himself.

The Scriptures teach us about the **only way** we can be saved…

Jesus said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” {John 14.6}

Jesus willingly substituted Himself in the place of sinners. As the only truly innocent person who has ever lived on this earth, He died a criminal’s death on a cross. The Bible explains what God did there and then. “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” {2 Cor 5.21}

“*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*” {John 3:36}

These Scriptures are teaching you now. Will you come to Christ and be saved?

**b) Profitable for reproof**

The word ‘reproof’ hereconveys the idea of convicting a person that they have done something wrong and summoning them to repentance. Scripture teaches us this sad truth about our natural condition: that we are spiritually dead. The church father Augustine said that we are by nature ‘curved in on ourselves’ (Incurvatus in se). We love ourselves more than we love God and our neighbour.

When the Holy Spirit shows us our true selves He brings conviction of sin within (John 16.8).

The Scriptures powerfully reprove. When the prophet Nathan came to King David, an adulterer and murderer he reproved this sinner saying “You are the man”. Likewise individual Christians are called to wield the reproving Word of God out of love for one another:"*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother*” {Matt 18.15}.

People desperately need the reproving power of Scripture in these ‘last days’, for there are so many who are “lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” {2 Tim 3.2-5}.

**c) Profitable for correction**

Correction is the positive side of reproof. If reproof says “you are on the wrong path”, then correction says “here is the right path”. The word ‘correction’ used here by Paul literally means a straightening up again and thus a restoration of something to its original and proper condition. In secular Greek literature it was used of setting upright an object that had fallen down and of helping a person back on his feet after stumbling. After exposing and condemning false belief and sinful conduct, Scripture then sets us straight and builds us up through its divine correction...putting us back on our feet so to speak so that we can continue to grow in Christ likeness, holiness, sanctification.

**d) Profitable for training in righteousness**

The word ‘training’particularly refers to child-training, as carried out with firmness and gentleness by loving parents. The Scriptures train us in righteousness. They show us God’s good order of life, by pointing us to the Lord Jesus Christ. They train us to put on this righteousness by living in Christ by faith, maturing in that. He is our entry into a life of godliness, and the source of our participation in the life of God. When we are joined to him by faith we receive grace upon grace. We need to learn how to be sanctified, how to live pious lives, participate in the life of God. By nature ‘we are like bleary eyed old men’ (as John Calvin described our natural condition). The Scriptures function like a pair of spectacles to enable us to see. As the psalmist puts it in Ps 119:105

“*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*”.

The Bible is the most valuable book that has ever been written. Don’t leave your copy gathering dust on the shelf, or just use its weight to press flowers…read what is written…learn about Christ!

1. **The purpose of the Bible**

To what end, goal, purpose is all Scripture breathed out by God to be profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness? We find the answer in verse 17

…*that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

The word ‘competent’ here is another hapax legomenon; a single-use word. We can understand it’s meaning from non-Biblical literature. It refers there to awhole number in arithmetic, to which nothing needs to be added to make it complete. So this word describes those persons who are complete, capable and proficient in everything they are called to be or do. When you've finished packing to go on a trip you have everything you need for the journey and you're ready to go! Likewise you are ready for the **work** of God once you have been trained by **Word** of God!

500 years ago Martin Luther had been equipped by the Bible for a good work; that of reforming the church which had gone astray. Now the phrase ‘diet of worms’ sounds quite funny. Perhaps for you it conjures up a mental picture of eating a series of meals consisting only of long cylindrical tube-like bodied creatures and no [limbs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limb_%28anatomy%29) wriggling around on the dinner plate!

500 years ago a ‘diet’ referred to an assembly of the Holy Roman Empire. Worms was the name of a place in the upper Rhineland of Germany. At the ‘Diet of Worms’ in 1521, Martin Luther had to appear before Emperor Charles V twice; each time he was clearly told to take back his teachings. However Luther didn't see any Scriptural proof against his theses or views which would move him to recant:

He said "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

The Scriptures had made Luther ready for the good work of proclaiming the truth of ‘Sola Scriptura’ in the face of intense opposition from the Roman Catholic Church which had combined both Scripture **and** ecclesiastical tradition as the joint rule for faith and life and by so doing had greatly increased her own wealth, power, influence and tyranny over the people.

The power of God’s Word is no less today than 500 years ago when protestant reformer Luther was equipped to serve God in Germany. The power of God’s Word is no less today than 2,000 years ago when Pastor Timothy was equipped to serve God in Ephesus. The same power of God’s Word is equipping people like you and me today in New Zealand to stand firm and strong upon the foundation of the Bible Alone as the sole source of God-breathed Scripture – the only ultimate, trustworthy, and infallible authority for faith and practice.

I met with a couple recently who were searching for a church to join. They asked me the right question ‘what should we look for in a church?’. I replied ‘A church which faithfully teaches what is in the Bible’. I am persuaded that the Reformed Church of Christchurch is such a place. In this church we are still being taught, reproved, corrected, and trained for righteousness by Scripture. We are not perfect, we are still being made complete by the Word of God

We have not yet arrived, but are still being made ready as a Bride for Christ our heavenly Bridegroom.

I am so thankful to our Lord God that we, in the Reformed Church of Christchurch, proclaim the same slogan that the Reformers first framed 500 years ago ‘Sola Scriptura’. Scripture Alone!

Amen